

## **Pacific Women in Climate Change Negotiations**

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**Abstract:** The contribution of Pacific women to climate negotiations is underacknowledged. Women may have limited roles as heads of delegations or the face of climate negotiations, yet behind the scenes they often play proactive leadership roles either as technical negotiators or coalition coordinators. Using a global talanoa methodology, the article traces the role of Pacific women in climate negotiations, with a focus on the Paris Climate Conference 2015. It finds that women take on leadership roles that have the potential to disrupt stereotypical gendered divisions of expertise. It also highlights how further in-depth research is required to ascertain whether the leadership space created by climate change negotiations can transform gender relations writ large. These counter narratives contribute to feminist research by highlighting that Pacific women are not passive victims of climate change.

**Keywords:** gender, climate negotiations, Pacific, Global talanoa, Paris Climate Conference

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### **Introduction**

Pacific island states have been active participants in multilateral climate change negotiations for over three decades. Yet little is known about how these small states perform inside multilateral negotiations. Specifically, we know little about the contribution of women from the Pacific in climate change negotiations. Much of the scholarship on multilateral negotiations is focussed towards understanding the role of a few big states, with only a handful exploring the power and influence of small states in what some scholars call the ‘Lilliputians’ (Keohane, 1990) or ‘dwarfs’ (Panke, 2012) in international politics. Furthermore, much of the scholarship on women and climate change in the Pacific focuses on women as the beneficiaries of climate change agendas and their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, rather than women’s leadership in decision-making and negotiations on climate change. This paper fills both gaps.

The under-representation of women in climate negotiations is well-established. When the global multilateral body on climate change, the Conferences of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), first met in 1995, around 18% of all delegates sent by parties to the convention were women (Kruse, 2014). While the number of total women state delegates may have gradually risen to 40% by the seventeenth COP in 2013, the overall figure masks the extent to which some states did not send women delegates.

This under-representation of women has been criticized by academics and practitioners; Christiana Figueres (2011), the former Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, has argued that women have “the power to make a major difference”. Similarly, women activists have long demanded an increase in “the participation of women in the formal decision making process” (Gender CC, 2010). This article is sympathetic to this stance, but argues that to be more inclusive of women we first need to understand the existing work and contributions of women in current climate change negotiations processes.

Across the Pacific women tend to be excluded from decision making at household, community and national levels. Women are under-represented nationally in political and other leadership positions (Baker, 2018; Corbett & Liki, 2015; Howard, 2019). Studies of women in global diplomacy have also revealed that the international relations sphere and its ‘rules of the game’ were designed and developed by men, and women’s entry into diplomatic roles, other than as a supporting spouse, has been relatively recent. In global diplomacy, women have tended to take on marginalised roles in areas of low stakes or less prestige, rather than roles that have significant economic and security claims and responsibilities (Aggestam & Towns, 2018).

Climate diplomacy is an international arena of high stakes – negotiations not only have environmental implications, but also have potential major economic and security impacts – and this is particularly true for the Pacific. The ability of states to advance their interests through diplomacy and dialogue to find common solutions by consensus is a cornerstone of international climate politics. Given diplomacy is recognised as a gendered institution (Aggestam & Towns, 2018) and women’s representation in decision-making across the Pacific is poor, we might expect that Pacific women are poorly represented in climate negotiations. On the other hand, we need to look at the potential of climate negotiations as a space where Pacific women can lead and perform outside of stereotypical gender roles.

In seeking to uncover how states have sought to define and advance their interests in these international negotiations, this paper looks at women from the Pacific, and the roles they take on in climate negotiations. After explaining the current literature of women in climate change negotiations and the utility of the Global talanoa methodology, the paper traces the participation and work of women from the Pacific in climate change negotiations, specifically the multilateral forum of COP21 in Paris in December 2015, at the final stages of the Paris Agreement. We find that women from the Pacific have been active in climate negotiations, and that exploring their roles provides a counter-narrative to the representation of Pacific women as passive beneficiaries of climate change responses or as the victims of climate impacts.

### **Situating women through global talanoa**

The under-representation of women in climate negotiations stands in stark contrast to a policy discourse identifying “women as vulnerable or virtuous in relation to the environment” (Arora-Jonsson, 2011, p. 744). There are three common narratives to describe women and climate change in the Pacific. First and most often, women’s vulnerability to food and water insecurity is emphasised due to women’s roles as household food providers. Secondly, there has been greater recognition of the gendered impacts of natural disasters and women’s important roles as first responders. This includes the impact of restrictions on women’s movement – due to cultural constraints or their caring roles – that exacerbates women’s vulnerability in times of natural disaster, as well reported increases in violence against women

in post-disaster periods. Thirdly and more recently, George (2019) has drawn attention to the slow and ongoing impacts of climate change including sea level rise and drought, which are harder to notice than natural disasters, and their adverse impacts on women in particular. It is important to bear in mind that these are not necessarily essentialist arguments that women are more vulnerable. Rather, the differential impact of climate change on women can be attributed to “pre-existing gender inequalities that leave women more vulnerable and with poor adaptive capacity” (Alston, 2013, p. 356).

Recognition of the gendered impacts of climate change are critical to demands for more gender responsive policy and planning. Yet, when women’s vulnerability or virtuous roles are emphasised and reduced to toolkits designed to promote the inclusion of women, the risk is that women are placed merely at the service of climate change adaptation and mitigation agendas. Furthermore, when women’s roles as disaster first responders or climate adapters is emphasised, policy makers risk extending the burden of women’s caring roles to environmental caring roles as well (Westholm & Arora-Jonsson, 2018). It is also critical to address women’s strategic interests in the transformation of gender relations (Beşpınar, 2010), in that changes to decision-making structures and institutions could address the underlying inequalities that find women more likely to experience the adverse impacts of climate change in the first place.

Women’s representation, typically measured by counting the number of women in decision-making roles in climate negotiations, is important to women’s strategic interests. Yet descriptive representation should not be conflated with substantive representation (Weldon 2002). Rather than simply adding women to existing structures as a means of improving gender relations, Acker (1992) issued a challenge to first understand the deep structures of institutions – or the values, culture and practices that become invisible, normal, taken for granted and unquestioned ways of working – and their influence on gender relations. This includes behaviours that influence inclusion and network development, and processes that legitimise or reinforce gender bias. As Acker (1992, p. 567) highlighted, “institutions [are] historically developed by men, currently dominated by men, and symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of men in leading positions, both in the present and historically”. Women who are ‘added’ to these spaces are contending with male dominated environments and rules and structures that have been constructed from the viewpoint of men.

Feminist research aims to make women visible by documenting women’s lived experiences, to highlight exclusions and bias, contradictions and complexities. Rather than looking at women’s experiences from ‘an analytical clifftop’ (George, 2012, p. 2), starting from women’s perspectives is important to drawing out the complexities and contradictions that women face when they take up leadership roles (D’Costa & Lee Koo, 2009). Gender relations vary according to cultural contexts, and rather than an oppositional or binary approach, many Pacific cultures emphasise relationality and complementarity. Sibling relationships in particular can play a strong role in defining women’s decision-making power (Soavanna-Spriggs, 2007; Jolly et al., 2015). Intersectional forms of advantage or disadvantage mean that power differentials are not only affected by gender, but also nationality, class and access to resources, income, education and connections.

Documenting experiences through culturally appropriate ethnographic methods is key to developing a holistic understanding of Pacific women and men’s roles in climate negotiations. Global talanoa is one means of achieving these feminist and indigenous research aims. This methodology synthesises three common approaches to conducting social science

research (Carter, 2018). Global talanoa incorporates various methods (talanoa or empathetic culturally-sensitive dialogues) and approaches from various methodologies practice tracing and political ethnography (multi-site and multi-level observations of transactional behaviour through thick descriptions) that describe key actors and processes of decision making. Subjectivity is fundamental when using global talanoa as it establishes professional and cultural connection using multiple insider and outsider identities. It is a mixture of passive participation, where the researcher is only in the bystander role, and moderate participation, where the researcher maintains a balance between 'insider' and 'outsider' roles (Dewalt, 2018). Political ethnography allows the researcher to understand linkages and impacts of policy, power and influence at multiple levels from the global to the local. The methodology encompasses participant observation, textual analysis and narrative analysis across multiple ethnographic sites (Marcus, 2011; also Campbell et al., 2014; Corson et al., 2014).

Talanoa is a Pacific research method. It denotes various forms of both individual and group interviews, which are either informal conversations – chatting or offloading – or formal intensive interviews (Vaiolenti, 2006). These empathetic dialogues take place following Pacific cultural and institutional protocols in building relationships with participants over time. For example, despite several email requests for a formal interview, an invitation for a talanoa session with one woman ambassador was possible only after the researcher was able to make known their cultural and familial connection to the ambassador's lineage. Practice tracing is unpacks behaviour and patterns of acts in a process, or in other words: an approach that describes patterns of meaningful action may be abstracted away from local contexts in the form of social mechanisms that can travel across cases (Pouliot, 2014). The methodology uses practice observations and political narratives to form an explanation of decision making processes through thick descriptions. In this study, the aim was to link conditions to outcomes of decision making through process tracing by supplementing the data gathered from the talanoa method and participant observation through political ethnography.

The collection of data involved ten months (March-December 2015) of access to various sites of climate negotiations.<sup>1</sup> One of the researchers was able to gain the trust of Pacific leaders, including prime ministers and ministers attending climate change meetings, as well as key negotiators. Negotiations are a process of debates, discussions, and compromise amongst multiple parties that attempt to achieve an outcome or multiple outcomes. By tracing consensus both as a process and outcome, the research illuminates two key elements of diplomatic studies: the actors involved, and their activities in conducting negotiations. This paper is based on research that traced Pacific women negotiators' involvement in the pre-negotiations, negotiations and agreement phases of climate change negotiations in 2015.

By using ethnography and the principles of talanoa, the study brings to the fore the experiences and stories of women in climate change negotiations. While it is based on the experiences of 65 accounts, it specifically focuses on 14 women that shared their stories and experiences through talanoa. Complementing this data from 2015 are accounts and reflections of women negotiators from the Pacific in various publications by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Women's Environment and Development

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<sup>1</sup> These meetings included the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Program's Pacific Climate Change Roundtable/High-Level Support Mechanism I in Apia (May); UNFCCC ADP2-9 in Bonn (June); Pacific Islands Development Forum Summit in Suva (August); Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting in Port Moresby (September); Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Program's High-Level Support Mechanism II in Apia (November); Pacific Small Islands Developing States negotiation bloc meetings in New York (November); and the Paris Climate Change Conference/COP21 in Paris (November-December).

Organisation from 2011 to 2019. These personal accounts supplemented observation notes on transactional behaviour during the negotiations as well as talanoa data from 2015, to further enrich the thick description of women's engagement and decisive influence in climate change multilateralism.

## **Women in Climate Change Negotiations**

The UNFCCC, first adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, did not acknowledge gender as an important issue in climate change, and women were not included in early climate conferences (Kronsell, 2017). Climate change was originally regarded as a scientific, technical, economic and security issue and male players dominated the climate negotiation space. However, unlike previous environmental issues such as efforts to address ozone depletion, it soon became apparent that climate change would require much more than technical innovation. This was due to the profound and interconnected social issues associated with climate change “that by their very nature make addressing it effectively a collaborative endeavour for society as a whole” (Morrow 2017, p. 32). Research on women's participation in the UNFCCC climate negotiations, however, has “barely gone beyond noticing that women are underrepresented” (Kruse, 2014, p. 350).

In recognition of the importance of women's representation, as well as the representation of women's interests, a number of informal and formal means have been introduced to ensure that gender is considered in climate change negotiations. The UNFCCC now collects data on the representation of women and men in delegations, promotes gender balance in state delegations, and provides training, guidelines and toolkits for integrating gender. Following campaigning by a coalition of women's networks, a women and gender grouping was granted constituency status, including official observer status and participation rights in 2011 (Morrow, 2017). Outside of formal systems, the Women for Climate Justice Network (Gender CC) provides a space for the representation of women's interests, a designated ‘gender day’ is held at each COP meeting, and at times gender workshops are held at COPs. However, these efforts place gender as a separate issue to the main game of climate negotiations, and leave responsibility for advocacy on the gendered impacts of climate to women. The implied assumption is that women who are representatives in climate delegations will represent women's interests. Alternatively, women's activist groupings outside of the main negotiations are expected to exercise influence from marginal positions.

At the same time, limited attention has focused on UNFCCC rules that reinforce gender bias. For example, rules on membership that require negotiators to be accredited diplomats and heads of delegations to be parliamentary ministers are likely to restrict opportunities for women's participation in negotiations. While these rules are not overtly discriminatory against women, their gendered impacts require further scrutiny (Goetz, 2006). As Chappell (2006) points out, informal and formal rules do not only prescribe or constrain membership, they also produce gendered outcomes in policies, legislation and commitments.

The climate negotiation space is a complex arena; there is no ‘top’ or sole ‘leader’ in climate negotiations, and therefore a seat at the table can be a frustrating place from which to influence agendas. Lessons from women's participation in politics have shown that an emphasis on representation at the expense of gendered analysis of institutional rules places undue emphasis on individual action (Sawyer, 2020; Kronsell, 2017). Individual women alone are unlikely to progress change; moreover, women have been found to be more likely to align

with their political party's stance on an issue, rather than seek to represent women, much in the same way male politicians would be expected to behave (Palmieri, 2020). Assumptions that individual women will represent women's substantive interests are blind to the pressures women face to fit in with dominant players, and to the diversity of women and the intersectional experiences that shape their identity, beliefs and values. In politics and policy-making, change or substantive representation of women's interests has been achieved when key actors form coalitions and work collectively to advocate for change (Weldon, 2019; Sawyer, 2020). In addition, change requires recognition that gender equality is not just a women's issue, but an issue for all actors (Kronsell, 2017).

Climate negotiations are a site where multiple actors must work collectively to build consensus. While heads of delegations play an important role, behind the scenes much work is undertaken by negotiators, scientists, NGOs, media and coalition coordinators. Women take on these multiple roles at climate conferences as representatives for their country, operating in an environment where negotiations are fast-paced and decisions will impact on national security, economic and environmental policies. Inter-state coalitions are pivotal in multilateral climate negotiations, and the need to develop consensus amongst a high number of actors presents a difficult task for any negotiator. To add the additional burden to female negotiators to represent women's interests, both national and international, is a big ask. In a 2015 study, Kronsell and Manusdottir found that women's equal representation on the Swedish negotiating team did not lead to a greater understanding of the gendered impacts of climate and the need for gender-sensitive and inclusive policy (Kronsell, 2017). We must recognise that for women to hold a position on a negotiation team requires in-depth knowledge of negotiations, science and international law, but not necessarily of social science or gender analysis skills.

### **The role of Pacific women in climate negotiations**

Women's participation in the climate negotiations must first be situated in relation to the Pacific Islands position in climate negotiations. Pacific Island states have long been prominent actors and agitators on climate change (Carter, 2015; 2018; 2020). By the late 1980s, Pacific states alongside island nations from the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean were some of the first countries to elevate the existential threat of sea level rise to low lying nations to a global concern (Ronneburg, 2016; Carter, 2020; 2021). In order to address lack of bargaining power and to share resources to advocate a global treaty on climate change, Pacific states were motivated to join other low lying and small island states to formalise a coalition, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) (Carter, 2021). Despite differences amongst the 44 member states in terms of culture, language and geography, this coalition was forged by a common recognition of the disproportionate vulnerability of small island territories and populations to withstand the negative consequences of climate change, as well as shared development and environment challenges and concerns. The stories and concerns of women from the Pacific through their state's representatives are intertwined with the stories of the peoples of other small island nations.

Pacific women have played high profile roles and been integral to the elevation of climate change as a global issue. Dame Meg Taylor, as Secretary General of the Pacific Island Forum, and Hilda Heine, as President of the Marshall Islands, have been staunch advocates and acted as the face of Pacific diplomacy in recent climate change forums (see Cox et al., 2020 in this special section). In the activism space, to name only one among many examples, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner is well-known for her poetry dealing with climate change and other

environmental issues. She delivered an address to the UN Climate Summit in 2014 that included a performance of her poem *Dear Matefele Peinem*.

Since the establishment of AOSIS in 1990, women have been an integral part of its membership and leadership. The chair of the coalition is selected by rotation from the three main regions – Pacific, Caribbean and the AIMS collective (African, Indian, Mediterranean and South China Sea) oceans representation – drawn from ambassadors based at the UN permanent missions in New York. Although leaders from Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada were the first women chairs of AOSIS, Nauru ambassador Marlene Moses assumed the leadership from 2011 to 2014. Moses strategically used her position as chair to elevate the climate change and sustainable development needs of the Pacific, and more importantly to empower Pacific women (Komai, 2011). She led AOSIS' ambitious agenda to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C, to generate support for up-scaling, and to highlight access to climate finance, capacity building and technology, and avenues for loss and damage as key issues for island states (AOSIS, 2015). According to seasoned negotiators, it was Moses' institutional innovation of making her chairmanship the 'Pacific chair', rather than Nauru's chair, that left a lasting impact (Talanoa, Pacific Negotiator, 2015).

Moses insisted on creating a formidable team of climate negotiators from the Pacific. Given the United Nations rules around accreditation of diplomats, she strategically selected women lawyers from across the Pacific and accredited them under Nauru. In a media interview in 2011 about her vision as the incoming chair of AOSIS, she stated,

*We are also providing an opportunity for the Pacific to be directly involved in mapping and driving the climate change negotiations. This is important because of our survival and the future of our nations must be central to the climate change negotiations.* (Komai, 2011)

Notable women leaders during Moses' tenure were Ngedikes 'Olai' Uludong from Palau, who was the Lead Chief Negotiator (SPC, 2017) and would later become Palau's Ambassador for Climate Change and to the European Union, before her recent post as Ambassador to the United Nations; and Malia Talakai from Tonga, who was Deputy Chief Negotiator and would later become a senior UN official. These women leaders consolidated and articulated Pacific positions and voices in the negotiations. Together with the non-government organisation Islands First, they spearheaded a campaign in the media and undertook speaking engagements at universities and conferences in order to raise the profile of both AOSIS and the Pacific. Ambassador Moses and her team epitomised the calibre of strong women Pacific negotiators from the region pushing for change inside climate negotiations, yet these stories are relatively unknown.

### **Pacific women at the COP21 Paris meeting**

The COP21 Paris meeting in December 2015 was the culmination of 12 intercessional preparatory meetings known as the Ad Hoc Durban Process (ADP) that started in 2013. In this all-important global forum, the goal of parties was to reach consensus on a text for a Paris Agreement. The mega-conference would not only host more than 38,000 state, private sector, civil society and interested individuals, but at the same time see a convergence of the international and regional negotiation processes. The preparatory ADP meetings saw member states negotiate both the process and the content of a new climate change agreement for 2020 to replace the current rules and enforcement mechanism for the UNFCCC treaty known as

Kyoto Protocol. The Paris meeting took place over three weeks, with one week allocated for state and coalition preparations and two weeks for negotiations. With over 36,000 participants from 196 parties, two observer states, and more than 1,236 observer organisations (ranging from UN bodies, specialised agencies, intragovernmental bodies and non-governmental organisations), and media, COP21 Paris was one of the biggest multilateral gatherings in history (UNFCCC, 2015).

Women accounted for 35 per cent of national delegates in total in Paris; for delegates from the Western and Eastern Europe Group, this figure was around 45 per cent and for the African countries, 21 per cent (Greene, 2019). In contrast, the Pacific delegation of 345 accredited negotiators from 14 island states had close to equal representation of male and female delegates. This was noted by one Pacific negotiator who had attended such meetings for over 20 years,

I think the Pacific islands is different from others in this respect. The delegations are very much close to equal in terms of gender participation and it's very clear that the roles of Pacific island women are not only of the support level (Fry, quoted in SPREP, 2016).

Inside the complex world of climate negotiations there would be three identifiable roles occupied by both men and women: technical negotiators, coalition coordinators and heads of delegations.

**(i) State delegates – technical negotiators**

States have their own internal rules for selecting representatives as accredited participants. These officials in COP meetings are known as the 'pink badge' holders. However, not all accredited participants may be involved in negotiations. Some officials are heads of governments or ministers who attend in a leader-representative role for a particular public initiative or the heads of government meetings. Other government or non-governmental officials may attend to participate in side meetings or the COP Expo; still more look after protocol duties for high level officials, or have media roles. Only a select few are known as technical negotiators. These are state-accredited delegates who engage in back room side negotiations, known as contact groups or spinoff meetings. These individuals have been especially tasked to speak on behalf of their states in the meetings. There can be as many 50 side meetings happening at the same time.

For Pacific states in Paris, technical negotiators make up the 'core group' for the Pacific. Negotiators were from varying backgrounds — climate change project practitioners, ministry officials, scientists, international lawyers, activists, media personnel, private sector, church ministers, academics, and even students (Carter, 2018). This multi-actor core group formalised a region-specific coalition known as the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) group in 2015, mandated by various leaders' regional declarations in 2015. As indicated earlier, almost 50 per cent of participants from the Pacific and those involved in the core group of technical negotiators in Paris were women. In fact, apart from Niue all states from the region had at least two women technical negotiators acting on behalf of their country.

Women played key roles as technical negotiators on a range of topics beyond women's stereotypical roles: on loss and damage from Tuvalu and Nauru; on adaptation from Cook

Islands and Tonga; on ambition and mitigation from Palau, Marshall Islands and Papua New Guinea; on REDD plus (mechanisms on reducing emission from deforestation and environment degradation) from Papua New Guinea; on finance from Samoa, Tonga and Papua New Guinea; and on capacity and technology transfer from Tonga. Returning to represent Nauru was Malia Talakai supporting the Pacific and AOSIS positions on adaptation in the negotiations. Her law and anthropology background, and her extensive research in the region on loss and damage, made her not only a source of technical knowledge but also procedural strategy. Rensie Panda represented a country not well-known for women's representation in high level leadership and was a passionate negotiator for Papua New Guinea, AOSIS and the Coalition of Rainforest Nations (CfRN) coalition. The seasoned negotiator had over the years built a reputation as a confident and disciplined orator in the negotiations, a journey she states was not an easy one,

I believe it is being a young woman negotiating in an area which I think is dominated by men. My biggest challenge was to rise up to this occasion and speak out, and earn respect from those in the room (Panda, quoted in SPREP 2016).

Linda Siegal and Diane McFadzien were also present, bringing a wealth of technical and legal experience to the Cook Islands delegation (PIFS, 2016). Although they may work for international organisations and reside outside of Cook Islands, they have been instrumental in coordinating Pacific positions in the meetings and have led and trained many women negotiators from the Pacific in recent years. This is underscored by the fact that the composition of the Cook Islands delegations was 90% women (SPREP, 2016). This core group of technical negotiators not only condition global and international negotiations, but through their work in the Pacific region they greatly influence and control the climate change agenda (Carter, 2018).

## **(ii) Coalition coordinators – lead negotiators**

While many women and men are involved in proceedings as technical negotiators, the most influential positions in meetings are coalition coordinators or lead negotiators. Inter-state coalitions are integral collectives and simplify the negotiating process for UN climate negotiation. During the Paris conference, negotiators from the Pacific were active in four key negotiation coalitions: AOSIS, Least Development Countries (LDC), CfRN and G-77 and China (G-77) (Fry, 2016). Negotiators not only have to manage the politics of one coalition, but at the same time lobby for the support of multiple other coalitions. For coalitions to achieve consensus, states and their negotiators work within a structure of coordination groups, based on the key priority themes of coalitions, in which they identify coalition coordinators or lead negotiators. This influential position, in effect, gives one or two individuals the ability to not only speak on behalf of their own country but also a collective of states in the closed negotiations (Carter, 2018).

In 2015, a new coalition emerged for the region, Pacific SIDS, but acting as a coalition raised a major concern. Pacific SIDS negotiators had a mandate from political leaders in the Pacific to speak as one, but there was a growing concern that in order to achieve consensus Pacific positions were being watered down. While inter-coalition consensus gave a platform for states to reach out to parties who were not normally associated with small island states, working within and amongst multiple coalitions paradoxically drowned out the voices of Pacific states in the negotiation rooms. The formalisation of Pacific SIDS, although limited by interactions in the negotiation rooms, nevertheless enabled Pacific negotiators to highlight key

demands of Pacific nations through the established coalitions of AOSIS, CfrN, LDC, Cartagena and G-77 (Carter, 2018). The Pacific SIDS task was made easier by the fact that most coalitions had a similar structure of thematic coordination groups, with lead coordinators initiating strategy and sharing information.

Women from the Pacific excelled as lead negotiators not only for Pacific SIDS but in other coalitions. As one long time Pacific delegate attests,

we've (the Pacific) had strong participation of women in our delegation for a long time, holding leading roles at the negotiations ... we've always had that strong participation and we select people on their merits and, as it happens, we have more women in engaged in this issue at the moment (Fry, in SPREP, 2016).

One advocate was Anne Rasmussen of Samoa. She was a co-facilitator of a contact group for UNFCCC on reporting and communications (SPREP 2012), and also a leader who took an active role in speaking on behalf of Samoa, AOSIS and Pacific SIDS on matters of adaptation and finance. Rasmussen describes the challenge to learn climate change technical language (or 'climate speak') (Carter, 2020, 2021),

it helps if you read up and know your stuff, a lot of research, understanding and engaging, you are never too old to learn! Know your stuff, step out there and give it a go (Rasmussen, in SPREP, 2012).

In recent years, Rasmussen has become only the second women from the Pacific to hold the SIDS seat in the UNFCCC Bureau, also known as the committee of Vice Presidents of the COP.

For more than ten years, Pepetua Latasi had represented Tuvalu at climate change intercessional meetings, also serving as head of delegation (SPREP, 2015). By Paris she had continued her leadership with a role as the head of the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG), and Co-Chair of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage. She used these roles to speak on behalf of Pacific states in the meetings,

I have found out that the only way you can get your message across is by making your voice heard by others and that is one of the greatest things I find about being the Chair of the LEG, I can let people know where Tuvalu is and what we are experiencing because most people don't know (Latasi, in SPREP, 2015).

In 2015, the former lead negotiator for AOSIS, Olai Uludong, returned not as a representative of Nauru, but as Palau's Ambassador to the European Union and Climate Change. She resumed the role of advisor to the leadership of AOSIS in the negotiations. More importantly, the articulate and bold negotiator became the stand-in for the chair of Pacific SIDS in the final week of negotiations. Her experience and seniority allowed the negotiator special access during the critical moments of the finalisation of the Paris agreement (Little, 2015).

### **(iii) Heads of delegations – ministerial**

The most crucial agreement phase was the final week of negotiations, in which ministers of state and heads of delegations confirmed the final agreement. Lead negotiators may have access to this final stage, but such access is usually limited to heads of delegations

or government ministers. In the final week of the 2015 Paris conference, two leaders from the Pacific joined a small group of ministers finalising key aspects of the agreement; these leaders would become climate champions for the Pacific (Carter, 2018). Prime Minister of Tuvalu Enele Sopoaga and his delegation held its red lines on loss and damage until the United States delegation was forced to have multiple bilateral meetings in the final days to create a package on the issue. Meanwhile Foreign Minister of Marshall Islands Tony de Brum championed the climate ambition goal of 1.5 long-term temperature goal by reaching out and building a High Ambition Coalition of more than 79 developed and developing countries (Christoff, 2016; Carter, 2018; 2021).

Nevertheless, in 2015 there were no women from the Pacific attending as heads of delegations. In previous COP and intercessional meetings, women from the Pacific, especially ambassadors, acted in this role. However, the Paris meeting was one of the most well-attended by heads of government for the High Level Leaders' Summit. In 2015, there were no women heads of government in the Pacific region. Yet the leaders' event took place in the first few days of the conference, and after leaders had left the role of head of delegation was assumed by government ministers or high-ranking officials. While some women acted in these roles – Ambassador Uludong assumed the role for Palau, and for Nauru, Minister for the Environment Charmaine Scott (Government of Nauru, 2015) – the situation presented a real barrier to high-level women's participation. The representation of men and women as heads of delegations was more indicative of the structures and conditions that present barriers to women's participation in national politics across the Pacific – which are significant (Baker, 2018) – rather than women's substantive contributions to climate change negotiation delegations.

## **Conclusion**

This research offers a counter-narrative to the representations of Pacific women as beneficiaries of climate change agendas, environmental caregivers or merely the passive victims of climate change. Pacific women have expertise to contribute to global governance, and they have played key roles in shaping and influencing negotiations and outcomes on loss and damage, finance, capacity and technology transfer, and adaptation. This account shows that women step outside of 'women's issues' and negotiate across a range of areas that require distinct technical skills as well as the political savvy to negotiate behind the scenes and influence agendas. However, they are participating within a gendered institution with taken-for-granted rules that can either exclude women or, alternatively, shape expectations that the presence of women will result in a representation of women's interests.

These accounts of the three roles that women take on in climate negotiations as technical negotiators, coalition coordinators/lead negotiators and heads of delegations highlights the complexity of climate negotiations, which are fast paced and involve a plethora of actors. In a space that is designed by men and for dominant economies, Pacific women can be marginalised. However, as individual states or united in inter-state coalitions, Pacific Island countries made use of collective action and adaptive leadership to gain power in negotiations (Panke, 2012; Corbett et al., 2020; Carter, 2021). In this multilateral consensus-based decision-making process, women negotiators are working hard to ensure that the interests of their state are maintained as a final consensus is reached.

The most visible of the three roles in climate change negotiations – at least to the outside public – are heads of delegations. This is the person that speaks in front of media audiences, or delivers the formal remarks of states within the plenary hall. For the Pacific, heads of delegations tend to be male heads of government or ministers. The accounts from the 2015 conference show that women are not well-represented at higher levels of leadership, in large

part due to their lack of representation in politics and high-level ministerial positions across the Pacific. However, when unpacking what happened inside the negotiations, we found the most influential roles that condition consensus were technical and lead negotiators. It is here that Pacific women were prominent actors. As one negotiator noted,

we have many Pacific island women in leading roles, stepping up in the international field representing their home islands and (our) region. Many of whom are excellent role models for others wanting to enter in the field (MacFadzien, in SPREP, 2016).

The accounts also show that the representation of women, as well as the representation of women's interests, is not simply a matter of accessing a seat at the table. Women are participating as representatives of their countries and by virtue of their professional backgrounds in law and science, their procedural and technical knowledge, and their negotiation skills. Women wear multiple hats and are required to build relationships with countries with competing priorities and diverse interests, all while seeking to best represent their own national interest. Rather than relying solely on women negotiators to represent women's interests, all climate technical negotiators need to be held responsible for understanding the gendered impacts of climate change and the actions needed to promote greater equality.

Politics and negotiations are the key to how power works and decisions are made. While tracking women's descriptive representation is important, counting numbers of men and women is not enough; in reality, climate negotiations are a collective effort, requiring consensus, power sharing, relationships and negotiations. Further research is needed to test assumptions about how women's interests are represented through the work of individuals, networks and coalitions, and how gender is incorporated in the totality of climate negotiations, a long ongoing process. As this account shows, Pacific women regularly display networked forms of leadership. The tension is that this work takes place behind the scenes and lacks recognition and reward.

The strategies used by Pacific Island countries in international climate change negotiations are disruptive to existing ways of doing things and have led to shifts in power. Through this work, those involved are "unconsciously creating both a diplomatic culture and network of Pacific negotiators" (Carter, 2015, p. 214). The roles that women take on in Pacific negotiations are also disruptive to stereotypical gender roles. However, further in-depth research and accounts with women and men are required to see if the climate change negotiating space provides room for transformation in gender relations and whether women's descriptive representation in climate negotiations does lead to representation of women's interests.

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